



Visitors pose for a photo during Winterfest last year. Park-based events this year take place on Saturday, Feb 27. More at <http://go.nps.gov/Winterfest> NPS PHOTO / JAY ELHARD

Denali delivers big shoulder season experiences

by Jen Jackson
Park Ranger, Interpretation

Read any travel website or tourist blog and you'll see an endless series of posts extolling the virtues of visiting Alaska in summer and advising against an "off-season" trip to the 49th state, as if there is nothing here but snow and cold and closed storefronts to greet you. But I know, as most Alaskans do, that despite a reduction in services, October through April are some of the most magical and memorable months to travel in our state and visit Denali National Park and Preserve.

FIND YOUR PARK

The sights, the smells and the feel of Denali are just different in the quiet months. In late September, when shuttle buses have stopped running and while weather allows, you can drive all the way to **Teklanika River** at Mile 30, then walk as far as you please down the Park Road, enjoying this wild place without the din of engines and crowds.

In fall, Denali is more muted, but grander somehow. The mountains are painted in the faded rust of the season's dying colors and capped with the season's first snow, which defines the curves and edges of these glacially-carved massifs. Cranberries are ripe and sweet following the frost and in the crisp air of the early morning it seems all one can hear is the shush and

snap of the bushes and the sharp plunk of berries hitting the bottom of a bucket. The air holds a spicy and savory smell as fallen leaves return to the soil.

While snow can fly at any time, autumn offers still-excellent hiking and wildlife viewing. On or off trail one may encounter the skitter and squeak of a fat Arctic ground squirrel taking in his last meals before a long winter sleep, or perhaps the chatter of the red squirrel warning you off a hard-won stash of spruce cones and mushrooms that will keep him fed through the harsh months. Fall brings an opportunity to watch male ungulates — such as Dall sheep, moose, and caribou — make displays of power and aggression as they prepare for the rut. The *thunk* of sheep horns or clatter of moose antlers is a truly awesome sound and the sight of rippling muscle and fur on impact can never be forgotten.

And maybe, just maybe, it is those darkest and coldest months in the depths of winter that provide the greatest chance to experience Denali National Park and Preserve in its most wild and peaceful moments. December through February all of the Alaska Range wraps itself in a sparkling white cloak to match its highest peak, Mount McKinley. In contrast is the deep green of white spruce dotting the landscape, evoking a sense of an old back-and-white photo. But then on the horizon, you may see bouncing balls of color, sled dogs wearing blue, green and red harnesses with pink tongues wagging, chomping and tromping and panting as a musher calls "*gee*" and "*haw*" on the trail.

In the pre-dawn hours of January, one hears nothing and everything all at once. Chickadees make a sweet, sharp call across the boreal forest as your snowshoes crunch on the crust of snow and, if you stop and wait for a few moments, even the snow will greet you with a tinkling, like the chimes of tiny frozen bells.

A winter evening can be equally as enchanting. With the full moon, skiing the

Park Road is an unmatched adventure. The swish of skis is replaced by the sound of one's own heartbeat when you stop to breathe in the glow of this vast landscape. Maybe that most haunting and beautiful of sounds, a wolf's howl into the night sky, will reward you for making the outing.

The most special of off-season experiences is reserved for the bravest of souls. Those willing to sleep outside in sub-zero temperatures extoll the virtues of winter camping — tingly fingers and toes in front of a crackling fire, frozen noses and frosty hair over morning oatmeal and coffee, vast open spaces, solitude and adventure.



NPS PHOTO / DANIEL LEIFHEIT

Road crews begin plowing the Park Road in February. Weather permitting, access opens to **Mountain Vista** (Mile 12) by mid-February, the **Savage River** (Mile 15) as early as the first weekend in April, and the **Teklanika River** (Mile 30) a week or two thereafter. The last day of off-season adventures is May 19, the day before regular schedules of shuttles and tours begin venturing farther into the park.



NPS PHOTO / KENT MILLER

Skiers return to the entrance area after they arranged to be dropped off by private plane more than 90 miles west in Kantishna.

Denali's fairy tale beauty persists through spring. By March there are more than 12 hours of daylight for you to play in a wonderland of snow and enjoy moments when you truly feel you have this crown jewel park all to yourself.

Throughout the off-season, camping in the Bear Loop of **Riley Creek Campground** is free on a first-come basis. Running water, restrooms, a warm fireplace, and permits for overnight stays in the backcountry are available daily 9 am to 4:30 pm at the **Winter Visitor Center** (Murie Science and Learning Center) at Mile 1.4 of the Denali Park Road.

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Caribou NPS PHOTO / KENT MILLER



National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

Denali National Park and Preserve

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Denali Park, AK 99755

E-mail

DENA_Info@nps.gov

Website

www.nps.gov/dena

Phone

907 683-9532, information line

907 683-2294, park business

907 683-9649, TTY

Summer bus, campsite reservations

800 622-7275 Nationwide

907 272-7275 International

www.reservedenali.com

Emergency

Dial 911

Corrections or suggestions?

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The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Winter Visitor Centers

Murie Science and Learning Center

Mile 1.4 Park Road
Open 9 am to 4:30 pm daily.
Offers general information, exhibits, presentations, backcountry permits, Alaska Geographic Bookstore.
Learn more at www.nps.gov/rlc/murie
907 683-2294

Walter Harper Talkeetna Ranger Station

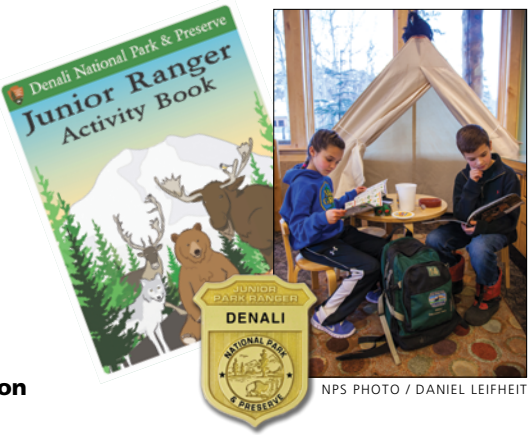
B Street in Talkeetna
Open 9 am to 4:30 pm daily.
Offers mountaineering information for the Alaska Range, general information, exhibits, Alaska Geographic Bookstore. 907 733-2231

Annual Pass Options

Denali NPP Annual Pass: \$40
America the Beautiful Interagency Passes:
Annual, \$80
Senior, \$10
Access, Free
Annual Military Pass, Free

Your Fees at Work

Eighty percent of fee dollars collected in the park return to Denali to pay for projects that have an impact on visitor experience. Recent projects include: informational signs, campground improvements, and trail erosion mitigation.



Complete a **Junior Ranger Activity Book** while you're visiting the park. Then show your work to a park ranger, take an oath, and receive a badge. Learn more at <http://go.usa.gov/DLj>



Winterfest

DENALI NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE DENALI BOROUGH

One of winter's signature events across Interior Alaska, **Winterfest 2016** is set for the final week of February.

This long-running community-wide event offers something for all ages, interests, and abilities. Activities vary from year to year. Events at the park, hosted on **Saturday, Feb 27**, typically include guided skiing and snowshoe walks, activities for kids, films, and dog sled rides. Warm up with hot drinks and light refreshments.

More at <http://go.nps.gov/Winterfest>

Group Activities

Welcome to Denali Reception –

Alaska Geographic staff can provide an exclusive welcome and orientation to Denali for visiting groups at the beautiful Murie Science and Learning Center. Staff will provide a short presentation based on the interests and time schedule of your group. For availability and pricing, please call 907 683-6432.

Guided Winter Explorations –

Alaska Geographic staff can facilitate fun and educational Denali experiences for visiting winter groups through hiking, snowshoeing and skiing (skis not provided). The route and distance can vary based upon a group's abilities and schedule. We custom tailor the experience to your group's interest in such themes as Winter Ecology, Winter Tracking, and the Science of Snow. Hot chocolate and tea can be provided around a fireplace at the Murie Science and Learning Center. Minimum group size is eight. Availability is from January through April, with the Mountain Vista location usually opening by mid-February. For availability and pricing, please call 907 683-6432.

Your membership and purchases at Alaska Geographic bookstores support park interpretation and outreach programs.

www.alaskageographic.org

Services

Accessibility

Most restrooms are wheelchair accessible. Park films are open-captioned. Please advise staff of needs when making a reservation. Find more information at <http://go.usa.gov/gg54>

Alaska Railroad

You can travel to Denali by rail from Fairbanks, Anchorage, or Talkeetna. Call 800 544-0552, or 907 683-2233 in Denali, or 907 265-2683 in Anchorage.

Banks

The closest bank is in Healy, 13 miles north of the park on Healy Spur Road. Winter hours: 10 am to 3 pm Monday through Thursday, and until 5:30 pm Fridays. 907 683-7750

Child Care

Located on Sulfide Drive in Healy, the Denali Preschool and Learning Center is the only licensed day care in the Denali Borough. Drop-in childcare is offered year-round, 7 am to 6 pm, Monday through Friday for ages 1 month to 12 years. Documentation of current immunizations is required, or sign an exemption. Contact 907 683-7789.

Gas and Propane

Available at gas stations 13 miles north in Healy, and 29 miles south in Cantwell.

Medical

The closest physicians and hospitals are in Fairbanks.

Healy, Interior Community

Health Center, located in the Tri-Valley Community Center, 13 miles north of the park on Healy Spur Road. Clinic hours are 9 am to 5 pm weekdays. On-call provider for established patients at 907 683-2211.

Talkeetna, Sunshine

Community Health Center, Mile 4 of the Talkeetna Spur Road. Open 9 am to 5 pm, Monday through Saturday, with 24-hour answering service at 907 733-2273.

Park Bookstore

A small selection of books and interpretive products is available at the Winter Visitor Center (Murie Science and Learning Center).

Post Office

Located next to Riley Creek Campground near the park entrance. Open 10 am to 12:30 pm, Monday through Saturday. 907 683-2291

For current and complete lists of businesses that are authorized to offer guided activities in the park, please visit <http://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/business-with-park.htm>

Winter Vehicle Tours

Two concessioners are authorized to provide road-based interpretive tours in association with the park's trial program to provide earlier access each February as far as the Mountain Vista Rest Area at Mile 12 of the Denali Park Road.

Alaska Alpine Adventures (Anchorage, AK)
877 525-2577
www.alaskaalpineadventures.com

Traverse Alaska (Denali Park, AK)
907 505-0925
www.traversealaska.com

Dog Sledding

One concessioner offers overnight sled dog passenger service and overnight sled dog-supported ski trips.

Denali Dog Sled Expeditions (Healy, AK)
907 683-2863
www.earthsonglodge.com

Skiing Guides

One company is authorized to offer guided skiing.

North American Telemark Organization
(Waitsfield, VT)
802 496-4387
www.telemarknato.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN SHIVE

Glacier Landing Scenic Air Services

Four businesses provide glacier landing scenic air tour services and glacier landing air taxi services in the park. Several also provide air taxi services to non-glaciated areas of the park, including Kantishna. For a full list of air taxi companies call 907-683-2294 or visit www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/flightseeing.htm

Fly Denali (Talkeetna and Healy, AK)
866 733-7768
www.flydenali.com

Sheldon Air Service (Talkeetna, AK)
907 733-2321
www.sheldonairservice.com

K2 Aviation (Talkeetna, AK)
800 764-2291
www.flyk2.com

Talkeetna Air Taxi (Talkeetna, AK)
800 533-2219
www.talkeetnaair.com

Scan this code with a free app on your smartphone to link to trip-planning resources on the park website

<http://go.usa.gov/WScT>

2 Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska



PHOTO COURTESY OF MOLLY MCKINLEY

Skiers trek from Kantishna to the park entrance in March 2013.

Be Prepared to Experience Extreme Weather Conditions

As changing weather conditions limit vehicle access westward into the park each fall, hiking remains a possibility as long as there is no snow. The Park Road generally remains open to the Teklanika and Savage rivers until the first snow, and hikers may set out from anywhere except designated wildlife closures.


While there are no groomed winter trails in Denali, there are numerous unmarked routes suitable for snowshoeing, skiing, skjoring, and mushing. Lack of snow is no indication of temperature. Be prepared for winter’s arrival anytime, and for extreme cold after mid-October. Proximity to the Alaska Range creates unpredictable and highly variable weather conditions. Be prepared to set your own course and be self-sufficient.


There are no telephones west of Park Headquarters and cell phone service is unreliable. Rangers do not initiate searches without a specific request. Notify someone of your planned itinerary and expected time of return.

Winter Safety Strategies

- Overconfidence can be the biggest danger. Be aware of the exertion required to travel in snow. Do not count on accomplishing more than a few miles each day.
- Traveling alone increases your risk dramatically. Any incident that immobilizes a solo traveler could easily become fatal. Traveling in groups is highly recommended.
- Moose may fiercely guard winter trails, particularly in deep snow years. Make every effort to yield the right-of-way.
- Frostbite occurs quickly at temperatures below freezing. Drink plenty of water and protect skin from exposure to cold.

 Cross-country skiing is a peaceful, rewarding way to explore Denali, whether on an afternoon trip on sled dog trails along the Park Road or on an extended trip into the backcountry. Telemark skiing and snowboarding involve long climbs on foot, but are becoming increasingly popular in Denali.

 Different lengths of snowshoes serve different purposes. A longer, flatter shoe is ideal for traveling in very deep snow, while a shorter shoe with an up-turned toe is better for traveling over an existing trail, across rougher terrain, or through brushy areas.


 Snowmachine use is not allowed in the old Mount McKinley National Park, which includes the Park Road. Snowmachine use is allowed in the 1980 park additions for traditional activities. See page six, and contact a park ranger for clarification.


- Hypothermia, the critical lowering of the body’s core temperature, is signaled by these early symptoms: *shivering, numbness, slurred speech, loss of coordination, drowsiness, and exhaustion*. Avoid hypothermia by eating plenty of high-calorie foods, drinking plenty of water, and staying dry. Layer clothing for your level of activity to minimize sweating.
- Avalanches result from a combination of snowpack, weather, and terrain factors which are frequently present in the Denali backcountry. Be aware of the dangers and avoid suspect slopes and drainages.
- Overflow, thin ice, and weak snow bridges along streams and rivers can cause an unexpected icy plunge. Carry dry socks, clothes, and emergency firestarter in a waterproof container.


Park Regulations and Safety Advisories


Top 10 Things to Know


For a safe and enjoyable visit, please become familiar with these important park rules and safety advisories.


 **Do not feed any wild animals, including birds.** It is unhealthy for them, and encourages aggressive behavior that may require management action. All pet food, trash, coolers, and cooking tools must be kept secure unless in immediate use. We all have a shared responsibility to keep wildlife healthy and wild.


 **Do not approach wildlife.** You must stay at least 25 yards (23 m) away from moose, sheep, wolves, and other animals. A distance of at least 300 yards (275 m) is required from bears. Regardless of distance, if any wild animal changes its behavior due to your presence, you are too close.


 Moose are faster and much less docile than they appear. A cow moose with calves can be especially unpredictable and hazardous. **If a moose charges you, run away.** Dodge quickly behind large trees, cars, or structures. If you are chased while caught out in the open, zigzag or change direction often.


 As you explore park trails and wilderness areas, be bear aware. You are safer hiking in groups. In areas of low visibility, make noise to avoid surprise encounters. **Do not run from a bear.** If you are going to spend significant time in the outdoors in Alaska, carry bear spray, and know how to use and dispose of it safely.


 Pets may be walked along the Park Road, in parking lots, on campground roads, along the Bike Path from the park entrance to the visitor center campus, and the Roadside Trail between the visitor center campus and Park Headquarters. Pets must be leashed with a lead that is six feet or shorter. Do not leave a tethered pet unattended. Owners must collect and dispose of pet feces.

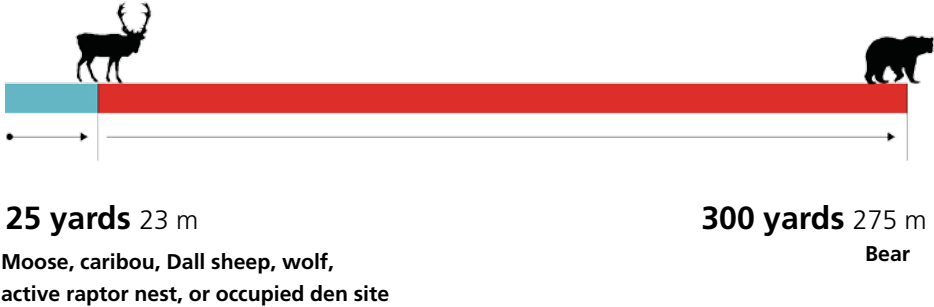
 In developed areas, stay on established trails and paths. If you are hiking with a group in areas where there are no established trails, spread out to reduce your impact on the landscape.

 **Leave what you find.** If you find a historic object, artifact, archeological feature or natural curiosity, do not collect it. Federal regulations require that such discoveries remain in context. To help researchers and contribute to science, snap photos and carefully note the location, preferably with GPS reference coordinates.

 Cyclists may ride on park roads, parking areas, campground loops, and a designated Bike Trail between the Nenana River and the Denali Visitor Center.

 **Share the road.** Pass no closer than three feet (1.0 m) to bicycles and pedestrians, especially if your vehicle has large side mirrors. On gravel roads, travel at “no dust” speeds that do not kick up a plume that will wash over cyclists and pedestrians. If you see wildlife while driving, do not stop or impede the safe and free flow of traffic along any portion of the road. Instead, park in an established pullout, and watch from a safe distance.

 It is the responsibility of visitors to understand all applicable firearms laws before entering the park. **Federal law prohibits firearms in certain facilities in the park.** Those places are marked with signs at all public entrances. The park concessioner does not allow firearms on tour buses. Passengers may carry a firearm on shuttle buses but it must be unloaded and stored in a locked container. Except as part of authorized hunting activities, discharging weapons is strictly prohibited throughout the park. Learn more online at <http://go.usa.gov/Bcch>



Watch Wildlife Safely

Please observe these rules for minimum distance from wild animals to ensure their safety and yours. Any distance that alters the behavior of a wild animal is too close.

Maintain minimum distances at all times. Resist the temptation to approach animals. Do not move to intercept an animal’s path.

Use binoculars or a telephoto lens to observe an animal’s natural behavior. Do not engage in photography if an animal moves closer than the minimum distance allowed. Remind others of their ethical responsibility when photographing animals.

Please do not follow an animal at close distance with a vehicle. Motorists must stop and allow an animal to cross the road safely.

Avoid stressing wildlife. Animals living here are engaged in a daily struggle to find food, shelter, and water necessary for survival. Avoid wildlife during sensitive times, such as when they are nesting, mating, or raising young.

Three Moose at Dawn

A cow moose comes
around the corner
through the snow.
Yearling twins
trail along in single file.

She's HUGE
and I stand at the door
watching this locomotive
of an animal

the same as I would
a freight train
at a railroad crossing,
lights flashing
and the warning gate down.

This is a long moose I think
and shut off
the motor of my day
while the three of them
move without hurry
down their own tracks
and grow smaller.

When the lights that aren't there
stop flashing and the gate rises,
I remember where I am
and restart the day

but I'm clumsy
getting things back into gear,
the same as I'd be if the three camels
of the wise men had just passed by
following a star.



John Kooistra
Writer-in-Residence
Winter 2015



Camille Seaman
Artist-in-Residence
Winter 2015



Denali Mountain Sunset, February 2015

Since 2001, the **Artist-in-Residence** program has hosted 60 accomplished artists, writers, and composers. A winter program began in March 2014 and features a stay at the historic Savage Cabin near Mile 13 of the Denali Park Road. Each residency takes place over a ten-day period and concludes with a public outreach activity. Eventually, each participant donates to the program collection one work of art that offers a fresh and innovative perspective of the park drawn from his or her own experience.

More at <http://go.nps.gov/DenaliArt>



Savage Cabin Interior, February 2015



Sonja Hinrichsen
Artist-in-Residence
Winter 2015



NPS PHOTOS / KENT MILLER

Artist-in-Residence Sonja Hinrichsen led two "Snow Drawing" events in March 2015. The first engaged local high school students on frozen ponds about three miles south of the park entrance. The second, in Fairbanks, was held in collaboration with the University of Alaska Museum of the North.

WORD SEARCH: FIND YOUR WINTER ACTIVITY

M	O	F	R	E	T	G	V	C	A	M	P	I	N	G	B	C	S	E	N
D	W	L	D	H	W	S	H	Q	U	G	F	M	K	O	P	R	I	B	Y
K	R	I	L	W	I	N	T	E	R	F	E	S	T	W	F	P	X	I	P
A	E	G	V	O	K	G	S	N	O	W	M	O	B	I	L	I	N	G	H
Z	R	H	V	J	M	M	D	U	R	Z	I	L	N	B	P	L	G	K	O
I	U	T	J	H	O	M	S	T	A	R	G	A	Z	I	N	G	M	C	T
T	D	S	I	W	U	Q	F	A	F	B	C	W	X	C	O	B	M	I	O
A	Y	E	D	S	N	X	S	T	H	X	S	M	C	Y	R	L	S	P	G
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P	X	N	Q	W	I	P	N	H	T	F	W	I	Y	I	D	Z	G	K	P
S	C	G	V	B	N	Z	N	R	X	L	B	O	N	N	Q	U	Y	N	H
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O	S	V	I	Q	L	A	E	W	S	N	O	W	S	H	O	E	I	N	G

- ☐ Artist-in-Residence
- ☐ Aurora
- ☐ Bicycling
- ☐ Camping
- ☐ Flightseeing
- ☐ Hiking
- ☐ Kennels
- ☐ Mountain Vista
- ☐ Mushing
- ☐ Photography
- ☐ Skiing
- ☐ Skijoring
- ☐ Smores
- ☐ Snowboarding
- ☐ Snowmobiling
- ☐ Snowshoeing
- ☐ Star gazing
- ☐ Visitor Center
- ☐ Wildlife
- ☐ Winterfest



Ancient Technology Survives Subarctic Winters

by Emily McCuiston
Archaeological Technician

In the ancient past the technologies of the first Alaskans in Denali enabled them to live in subarctic climates without the gear available today. Some indigenous technologies are still in use and many have been adapted, such as modern snowshoes. Subarctic Alaska demanded much of its occupants. It required an intimate knowledge of the region’s geography, skills passed down between generations, and advanced preparation for winter.

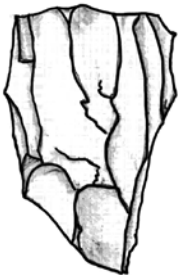
In the past, people had to be highly mobile to survive. They travelled over hundreds of square miles and returned to familiar places to obtain resources. Preparation for winter would be underway by summer — fish caught and game hunted and dried. Plant foods too would be preserved for later use.

When winter arrived, semi-permanent villages were established, often in forested areas and near clean water. People relied on food they stored, as many Alaskans still do, supplementing it with what was available during the colder months, such as hares, grouse, ptarmigan, and plant foods. Indeed some plants, such as wild potatoes, become sweeter after first frost and can be harvested throughout the winter. Frozen ground can be thawed by building a large fire on top of it. Medicinal plants such as labrador tea and the cambium (inner bark) of spruce also would be consumed in the winter. People gathered to share food at potlatches — events for feasting and reuniting as a

community. With these technologies and others, the people of interior Alaska could make it through the harshest seasons.

People first migrated to the Denali area at least 13,000 years ago. Only those things which are most tenacious in the archaeological record, primarily stone tools, remain to tell the story of these first Alaskans. Though stone tools were used year-round, inferences can be made about particular types of stone tools and seasonal hunting, thus expanding our understanding of how people were subsisting in the winter. By studying several archaeology sites in conjunction, archaeologists are beginning to understand a larger picture of past seasonal rounds.

This chert microblade core was found in Denali. The flakes removed left distinctive parallel scars. Blade technology was an efficient way of using stone material as it maximized cutting edges and minimized waste of what may have been scarce and precious stone material. It has been theorized that microblades were used for hunting large ungulates, such as bison and moose, in the fall-winter-spring seasons. (Potter, 2011)



Caches: Caches were made to protect food from animals and store it for winter. Caches in this area were usually underground pits or elevated structures. Abbie Joseph, an Athabaskan woman who lived here from

the late 1800s-1986, remembered a cache built by her grandfather. It was two stories high and was built using standing trees. Other trees in the vicinity were cleared so that squirrels couldn’t jump to it. Roots were used to lash it together and the roof was thatched with bark. Foods such as berries (often mixed with fat, which helped preserve them), root vegetables, dried meat and fish were cached. The cold climate and permafrost into which pits were often dug surely helped preserve the food. Some of these pits are still visible on the ground.

Snowshoes: Snowshoe technology, which likely made its way from Asia long ago, has been widely used in Alaska for thousands of years. Snowshoes distribute weight across a greater surface area, thus keeping you from sinking as deeply into the snow. The snowshoe hare with its long, furry hind feet illustrates this principle well. Snowshoe designs were numerous. Different types of snowshoes were made for different snow conditions. Powdery snow necessitated tighter weave for more surface area contact with the supporting snowflakes. Long snowshoes have a “tail” to keep them pointed straight, and sometimes have a kick-up in the front for deep powdery snow. Shorter, oval snowshoes were used on packed snow. Snowshoe frames could be constructed with a variety of woods, but flexible birch with straight grain was preferred by many. Sinew was used for webbing. Snowshoes today are often used for recreation, but they are also a tool to allow mobility across a snowy landscape, be it individual transportation or for breaking trail in front of a dog team.



Denali NPP Museum Collection

Elevated cache photographed in the 1940s

Haynes, Terry L., David B. Andersen, Wm. E. Simone
2001 Denali National Park and Preserve: Ethnographic Overview and Assessment. Fairbanks, AK, Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Potter, Ben A.
2011 Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene Assemblage Variability in Central Alaska. In From the Yenisei to the Yukon: Interpreting Lithic Assemblage Variability in Late Pleistocene/Early Holocene Beringia, edited by Ted E. Goebel and Ian Buvit. Texas A&M Press, College Station.



NPS PHOTO / NEIL BLAKE

Nick Dennis of Nikolai, AK with a traditional snowshoe he made in 2009.



Denali NPP Museum Collection, DENA 0022986

A tow rope makes Mount Healy easier.



Denali NPP Museum Collection, DENA 0022988

Soldiers attend a ski lesson.

Park Celebrates Past as Army Recreation Camp

by Jessica Peterson
Archaeological Technician

Can you imagine Denali with a downhill ski course and tow rope? It might not be apparent now, but during World War II, soldiers in the U.S. Army had their choice of outdoor activities here including downhill skiing a route along what is now the Mount Healy Overlook Trail.

Following the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, what was known then as Mount McKinley National Park closed its doors to visitors. At the time, Alaska was still a U.S. Territory and during the war all travel across its borders was monitored by military checkpoints. Tourist travel was not allowed.

Nationwide, funding for national parks was diverted for use by the War Department, and parks began offering services to the military. While conservation and preservation remained key to the NPS mission, the agency also addressed demands for war materials such as timber and other natural resources. Several parks became training grounds or recreational camps for servicemen and at least one served as a POW camp.

For two years from 1943 to 1945, the park was set aside for the recreational use of about a hundred U.S. Army soldiers each week from Ladd Field, now Fort Wainwright, and Fort Richardson and also provided a mountain-rich arena for winter equipment testing. The Alaska Railroad contributed its facilities, including the Park Hotel, in a joint effort led by U.S. Army, Red Cross, Forest Service, and NPS staff.

“The first of those boys are at the park now, enjoying the life of millionaires,” describes a U.S. Army brochure. “At the cost of two dollars a day, the boys are doing what tourists have spent thousands of dollars to do—living at the foot of the majestic peaks of the Alaska Range.”

During summer, recreational activities included hiking, horseback riding, fishing, softball, and miniature golf. Winter activities included sledding, skating, and skiing. The Army also provided a ski instructor by the name of Corporal Jack Yokel, a national champion before the war. Now those ski slopes are covered in dense alder and as you walk the Mount Healy trail, these trees are a good indicator of where the original ski hill was located.

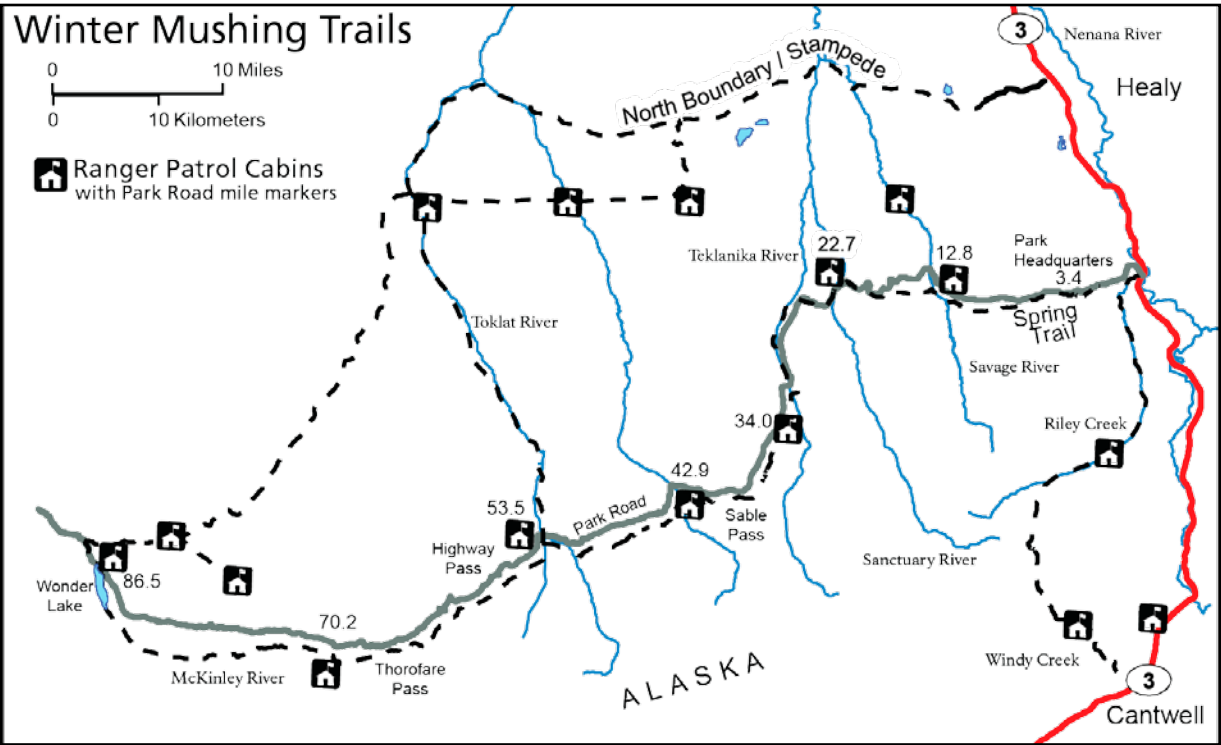
Combat operations in Alaska ended in late 1944 and the military presence was drastically reduced. On March 1, 1945 the camp closed and all staff vacated shortly afterwards. The park reopened to the public in spring of 1946.

Today, some 70 years later, little evidence remains of the camp. The Park Hotel burned down in 1972 and many other facilities were torn down or renovated. The only original structure remaining from this period is a yellow powerhouse located near today’s main visitor center. Occasionally, other materials related to this era are found, including snowshoe fragments, ski poles, boots, and ski fragments. The history of the camp, the artifacts, and the altered landscapes that have been left behind are now a part of our own national heritage. Preserved and protected, they contribute to our understanding of the multi-functional history of this park.



Denali NPP Museum Collection, DENA 0023004

Soldiers at the Alaska Railroad Depot in 1943.



Trails within the wilderness boundary of the park are put in and maintained by dog team only. They are narrow and have potentially soft, deep snow. Trails are not marked. Be prepared and able to put in your own trail and safely navigate the terrain without a trail to guide you. You may encounter willow and alder thickets. Trail clearing or cutting is NOT allowed within the park. For additional information on rivers, overflow ice, aufeis, glaciers, and avalanches, go to <http://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/mushing.htm>

Spring Trail: Difficult to Moderate
Steep and narrow. Winding through large trees with several stream crossings. Snow cover may not be adequate for travel until spring.

Park Road: Easy to Moderate
Wide, open travel. Prepare for aufeis, side hilling, and windswept bare areas. West of Savage River the trail is mainly OFF the Park Road. Heavy equipment can be on the road from Miles 3-7.

Wonder Lake/Kantishna Area:
Easy to Difficult
Trail opportunities are highly varied. Please speak with a kennels staff member for details.

Windy Creek: Easy
Cantwell entry trails are frequented by snowmachine and dog team. Beyond the Denali wilderness boundary the trail may be less traveled or nonexistent.

Riley Creek: Moderate from Park Headquarters to Riley; Expert over the pass to Windy
Riley Creek/Park Headquarters area trails are frequented by skiers and snowshoers. Prepare for shelf ice, jumble ice, holes, and open water in the narrow Riley Canyon. Avalanche terrain.

North Boundary/Stampede Road: Easy
Traveled, packed trail used by snowmachines and dog teams. Several side trails cross the main trail. Trapline trails exist with traps in the trail.

Clearwater/Awesome Pass: Difficult
Accessible by snowmachine outside wilderness boundary. Prepare for overflow and glare ice on Clearwater and Moose creeks. Routefinding will be necessary over Awesome Pass.

Historic Kennels Open Daily to Winter Visitors

In autumn, visitors are welcome to watch the park sled dogs train for winter by pulling ATVs on roads and loops of the Riley Creek Campground near the park entrance. Check with staff at the visitor center to learn the kennels training schedule for the day.

Please stop your vehicle if you see a team approaching. Ensure that pets are safely inside vehicles if you see or hear dog teams. For your safety, kennel staff discourages walking pets in the campground while dog teams are training.

In winter, visitors to the kennels may see teams harnessing up and preparing to leave on a run, returning from a run, or loading and unloading a dog truck that is used to drive to distant trailheads. This busy time of year, it's wise to ask at the Winter Visitor Center about team whereabouts before you set out.

The kennels are open daily 9 am to 4:30 pm, with parking at headquarters at Mile 3.4.


As you arrive, be sure to check in with kennels staff and read all posted safety information.

- For the safety of your pets, please leave them in your vehicle while you visit the sled dogs.
- Keep children at your side at all times.
- If any dog acts excited (jumping, barking, pacing) or nervous, please visit another dog.
- Help train the park dogs to have good manners. They should not jump on you, chew on fingers, or eat any human food.



A ranger rests a team of sled dogs on an ATV training run.

Snowmachine Use Prohibited in Wilderness Areas

 All motorized vehicles are prohibited in wilderness-designated portions of the park. Snowmachining is allowed only for traditional activities, including access to subsistence hunting and harvesting areas, as well as to inholdings and villages in new park and preserve additions created by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980.

Each winter the superintendent may open limited areas to snowmachine access once it has been determined there is adequate snow cover to limit damage to vegetation and soil beneath the snowpack. A combination of factors are considered, such as snow depth, snow structure, and characteristics of the vegetation.

- Federal regulations require that riders do not:
- Intentionally disturb or frighten wildlife
 - Operate a snowmachine which is excessively noisy
 - Operate a snowmachine without a headlamp and red tail lamp one-half hour before and after sunrise/sunset or when weather reduces visibility to less than 500 feet
 - Operate a snowmachine in excess of 45 miles per hour
 - Race with other riders.

More at <http://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/snowmobiling.htm>



Fat tire cycling is increasingly popular on the Denali Park Road.

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Answers to **Word Search** on Page 4

“As far into
this winter
wonderland
as you dare
to dream”

by Jennifer Raffaeli
Kennels Manager

Winter – when the buses stop running, the bears are in hibernation, the rivers are locked underneath ice and the tundra is covered in snow – is indeed my favorite time of year up here. I may be biased in that opinion as the Kennels Manager as I am lucky enough to traverse this landscape with the best winter traveling companions you could hope for – sled dogs.

I want to answer for you some of the most common questions from visitors year round. I hope to shed a little light on traditional dog team travel in Denali and, more importantly, encourage you to strap on snowshoes or skis or find a dog team to take you as far into this winter wonderland as you dare to dream.

But don’t you get cold?
Don’t the dogs get cold?

No, traveling by dog team is actually a very physically strenuous activity with very little time standing on the runners. More often than not, one of the rangers is skiing or snowshoeing in front of the teams to break trail if the snow is too deep for the dogs. If it’s more than chest deep they start dolphin diving. Our biggest challenge is keeping our extremities warm. We protect our faces with fur ruffs on our hoods, balaclavas or neck gaiters. We protect our hands and toes with big mitts, overboots and chemical hand and toe warmers.

The dogs are well-adapted to the cold. They have a nice, thick two-layer fur coat and fluffy tail to keep them warm. They also have special fats in their feet called *neatsfoot oil*, which stay liquid even in extreme cold. In addition, their bodies have a counter current circulation system that allows them to keep their legs and feet comfortably a few degrees cooler than their core. Both of these physical adaptations are shared by other arctic and subarctic animals.

How do you handle
the darkness?

Truth be told, I think the darkness is beautiful. The hardest month is November before the snow really falls, it feels dark and cold. Once we have snow on the ground it really reflects a lot of light – sunlight and moonlight. The dark feels cozy and quiet to me. It is a welcome respite after a manic summer with 24 hours of daylight. I think our bodies need time to slow down and recharge after a busy summer season and winter darkness allows for that. The secret to enjoying the dark is to go outside just as you would in the daylight, and don’t use a headlamp! You get caught in a circle of light and miss so much of the world around you.



Kennels Manager Jennifer Raffaeli takes a team on patrol.

Photo Courtesy of Camille Seaman, Artist-in-Residence 2015

Give your eyes a few minutes to adjust and it becomes quite easy to see well in the dark and snow. I love a moonlight ski on the Park Road or bundling up to watch the Northern Lights dancing overhead. The darkness holds so much beauty if we are willing to step out into it.

How long are you usually out?
How do you carry all your supplies?

We usually go out for a minimum of a week and up to four or more weeks at a time. Travel by dog team is slow and challenging as we work to establish routes through snow. Our sleds are heavily loaded with all of our backcountry gear and any project supplies. We are lucky to have a series of historic ranger patrol cabins along the Park Road as

wood or propane source of heat, propane lanterns for light, a simple cookstove, and a few bunk beds. I love the simple life in the cabins — no internet, no phones, no TV, just a good book to read by lamplight, good people to talk and laugh with, sweet dogs to cuddle with. It is very relaxing and I never miss “civilization” when we are on the trail.

When we are out in the park the dogs sleep on drop lines in the snow outside the cabins. They love digging a cozy nest in the snow and curl right up into little balls after dinner to stay warm for the night. They are smart to dig down into the snow as the ambient temperature there can be considerably warmer than the air itself. If it is snowing or blowing, the dogs will just let the snow accumulate on top of them to act as a blanket.

We do choose a couple of different dogs each night to bring into the cabins with us. They LOVE getting picked to be the center of attention inside, they love getting to jump on the bed and get belly rubs and ear scratches, but they have a hard time with the warmth. We can usually warm the cabins up to 50 or 60 degrees above zero. The dogs pant a lot and are more than happy to run back outside to join the rest of the dogs for breakfast in the morning.

What kind of sleds do you use?
We build, maintain and repair our own toboggan-style sleds using a combination of laminated wood (usually ash or hickory) strips, ultra high molecular weight (UHMW) plastic, and metal parts. Our sled beds are 8-12 feet long. Our sleds are very heavy duty, built to withstand the rigors of hauling heavy loads over tundra, gravel bar, ice, and snow. We carry repair kits on the trail to fix and replace parts as needed. Our freight hauling sleds are much sturdier, heavier, and larger than the racing sleds you might see used in the Iditarod or the Yukon Quest. One of our sleds weighs about 150 pounds empty.

well as on the north and south boundaries. We are able to stock the roadside cabins with a winter’s worth of dog and human food so that we can resupply as we travel farther into the park. When we are on an extended camping trip or setting up a remote campsite, we often have to take many extra trips to shuttle supplies, equipment and food back and forth. We will often rig an extra supply sled between the dog team and sled to carry more gear and equipment and still safely maneuver the sled.

Where do you stay?
What about the dogs?
We often stay in historic ranger patrol cabins if they are along our project route. These cabins were originally built to be about a day’s mush (20-25 miles) apart. They are very simple one-room log cabins with a

Why does the park still use dog teams
rather than snowmachines?

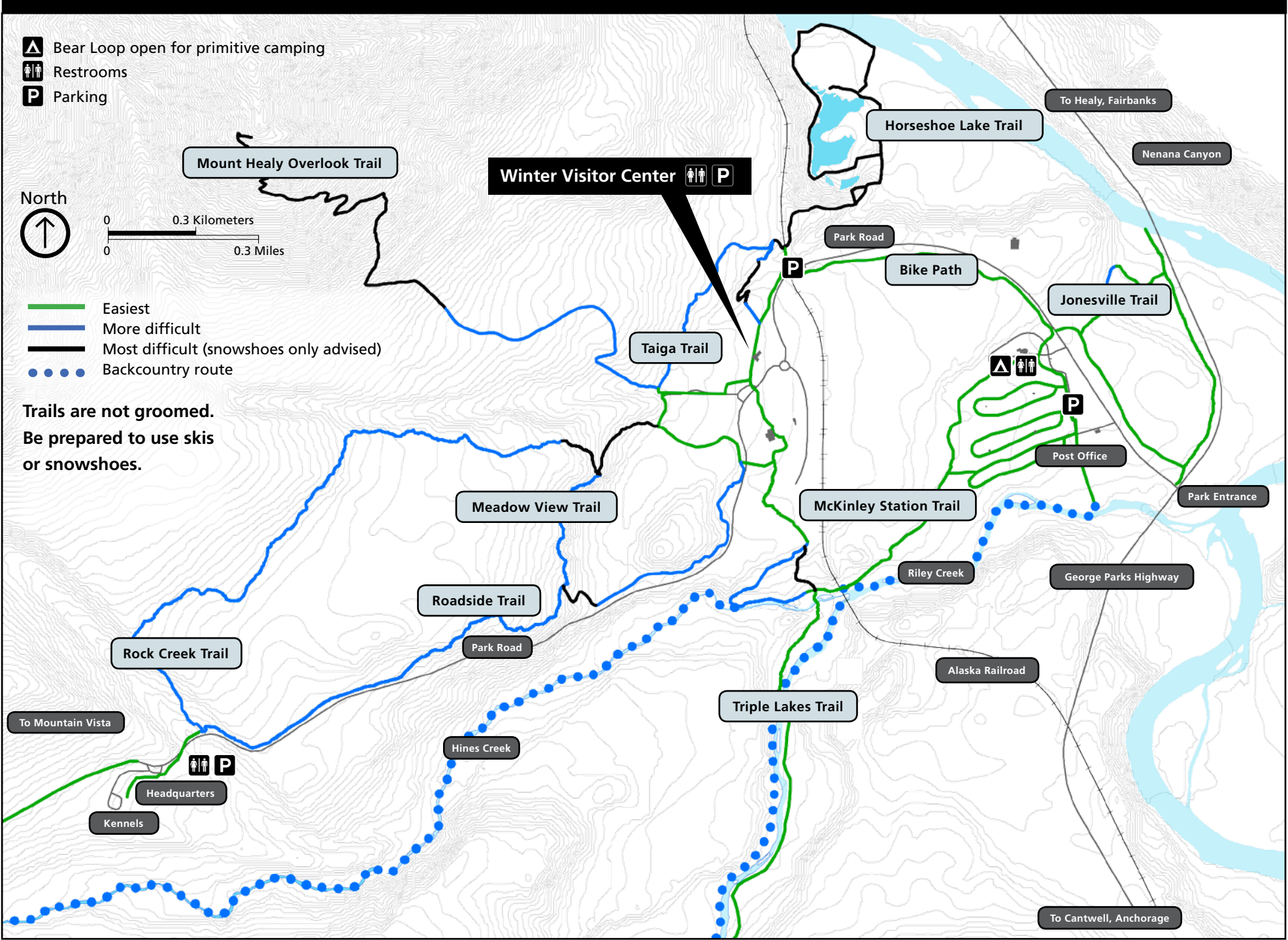
The Wilderness Act of 1964 is the driving force behind the continued use of dog teams in Denali in this modern era. This legislation was used to designate the original two million acres of Denali as Wilderness, the highest level of protection for federal lands. Wilderness areas prohibit the use of motorized or mechanized transport. There are an additional four million acres of land that are park and preserve additions that are not designated Wilderness.

In addition to complying with law, there are still many practical reasons to use dog teams in Alaska in winter. They can be more environmentally friendly since they don’t require fossil fuels to go. They are a relatively quiet means of travel. They can have less impact on the land itself. Dog teams start and go more reliably in subarctic winter conditions, such as extreme cold and overflow. And they are a whole lot more fun to cuddle up with in camp at the end of the day than a snowmachine. Finally, sled dogs are a huge part of the tradition of Denali. We’ve had working dog teams here since 1922 when Superintendent Harry Karstens purchased our first seven sled dogs.

What are you doing when you go out
with the dogs?

The dog teams are used to support a variety of projects throughout the park. A few recent projects we have worked on include:

- Supporting the park glaciologist in monitoring the Traleika Glacier in winter. Very little is known about snow accumulation and temperature on the glacier in winter as most monitoring is completed in the summer months.
- Hauling supplies for Trail Crew to build the bridge over Riley Creek and some of the boardwalks and bridges on the Horseshoe Lake trail.
- Collecting scat as part of a study of mesocarnivore populations in the park (coyotes, lynx, foxes) and how their population numbers correlate to changing wolf population numbers.



Entrance Area Trails

(Hiking/Snowshoeing)

Easy to moderate wooded terrain with some hills. Packed snow with occasional drifts. **Roadside, Meadow View, Rock Creek, Taiga, Horseshoe Lake, and McKinley Station** trails.

Mount Healy

(Hiking/Snowshoeing)

Moderate on packed snow to a set of trailside benches. At higher elevations, expect deep snow drifts, exposed loose rock, ice accumulation, and high winds.

Riley Creek and Hines Creek

(Backcountry XC Skiing)

Non-maintained wilderness trails. May encounter shelf ice and open water that require route finding.

Park Road

(Mushing/Snowshoeing/Hiking/Skate and Backcountry XC Skiing/Skijoring)
One lane cleared to Mile 7, suitable for skate skiing. Expect to encounter dog teams. May encounter overflow ice.

Riley Creek Campground

Open, level ground and loop roads well-suited to family activities and beginner skiing.

Triple Lakes

(Backcountry XC Skiing/Snowshoeing) Moderate to strenuous. From the trailhead at McKinley Village, travel north across the three lakes, then over the low divide to Riley Creek. Advanced skills required.

Trails have multiple uses.
But if you encounter ski tracks while you are walking or snowshoeing, please avoid stepping on them.

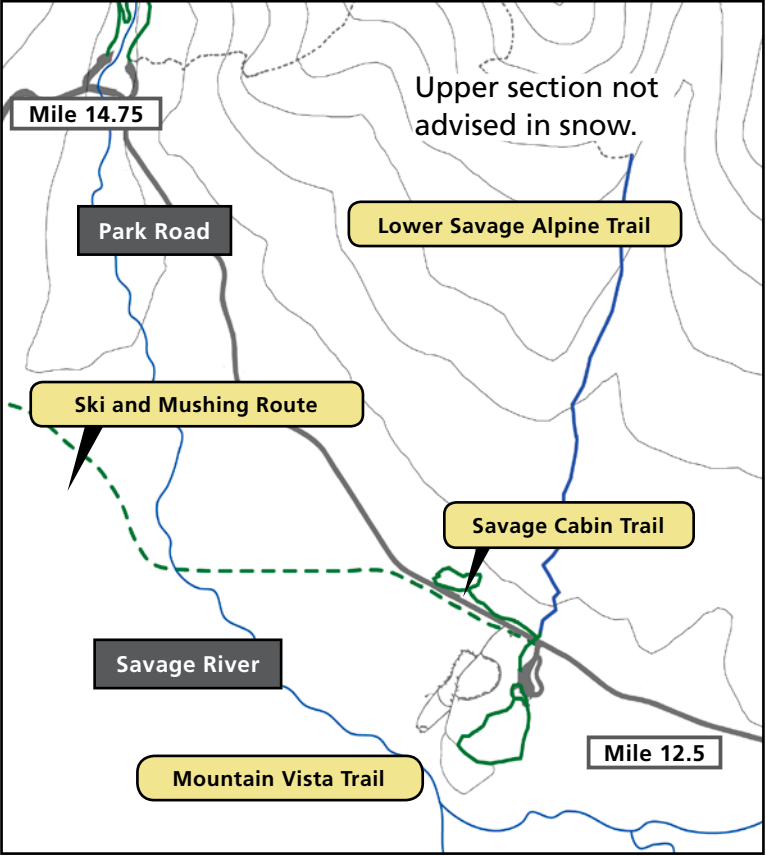


If you encounter dog teams or skijorers while you're on skis or snowshoes, please grant them the right of way.



Displays of the aurora borealis, such as this one above the Park Road in March 2015, are produced as electrons and protons from the sun are pulled into the atmosphere by the earth's magnetic field and then collide with oxygen and nitrogen atoms.

NPS PHOTO / KENT MILLER



Access to this area begins in mid-February based on conditions
Areas of transition between forest and tundra can be wind-swept. Your best skiing may be near trees. Try traveling up the Savage Alpine Trail about a mile, then break trail through the forest back toward Savage Cabin.

Mountain Vista Trail 0.6 miles/1 km, 30 minutes 50 feet elevation change 5% maximum grade	Lower Savage Alpine Trail 4 miles, 6.4 km 2-3 hours one way 1,500 feet elevation change Up to 25% grade 2 feet wide Upper section not advised for travel in snow
Savage Cabin Trail 0.8 miles/1.3 km, 30 minutes No change in elevation 5% maximum grade	Ski and Mushing Route Moderate rough unmarked route through willows to Savage River